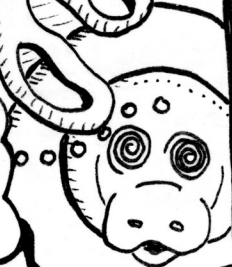


by Max Airborne, 2019

I recently lost a
best friend.



QUEER
BAD
ALONE
BAD
BAD
BAD...



memories & 6 east

episode 2

The CASCADE of
events left me feeling
hollow — frozen
So ... familiar



by max r

Remember Bic
lighters?
The plastic,
oval ones?

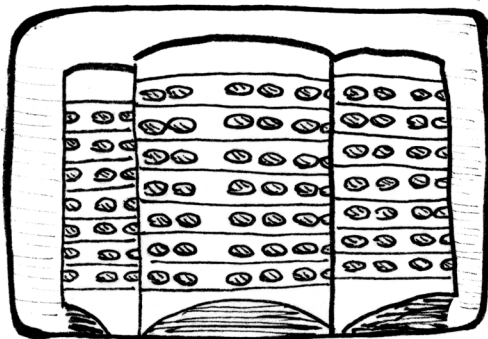


Wayyy back in the day,
before safety regulations
(1979), they were

ADJUSTABLE

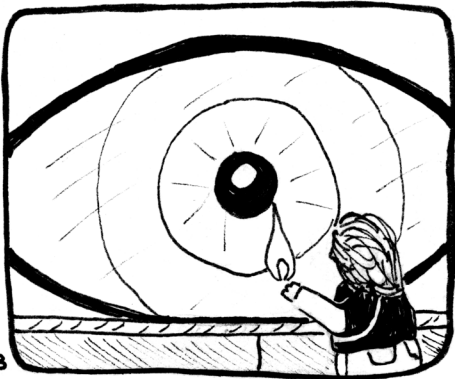
You could
really
TORCH
some shit.



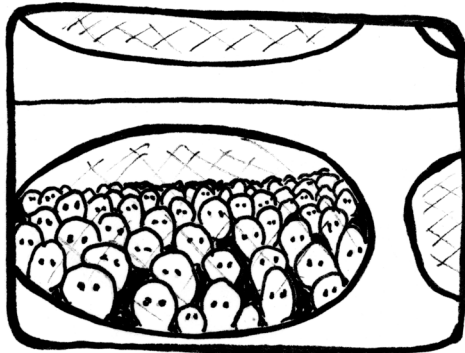
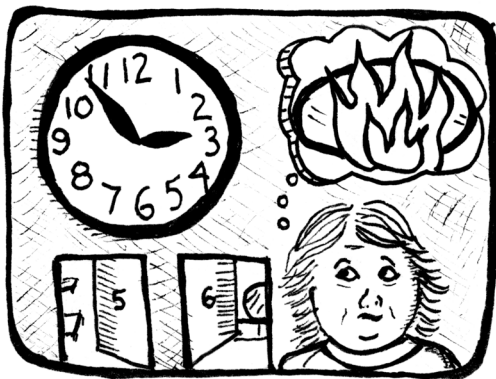


I knew I'd never actually escape through this plastic window. Wouldn't break. Didn't open. One of 1000 perpetually astonished eyes in an endless tubular grid, poking out into the world.

Nevertheless, on the East ward of the 6th floor, in a double room that held two teenagers, I was completely devoted to melting a hole in the window with my Bic.



I was **OBSESSED** -
could hardly wait for
"quiet time" to resume
torching the same
blackened spot I'd
been at for weeks.



Scratches on the window misted
the view of Lake Michigan.
I imagined an infinite ancestry
of kids who'd been hidden away
in this room, scraping their
contraband tools against this
once-clear surface, fighting
the monster by scratching
out its eyes.

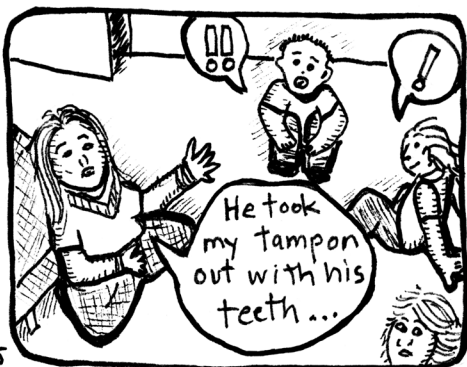


I was intrigued and terrified of my new roommate. Punky was older than me, already in high school. A tough, Chicago city kid.

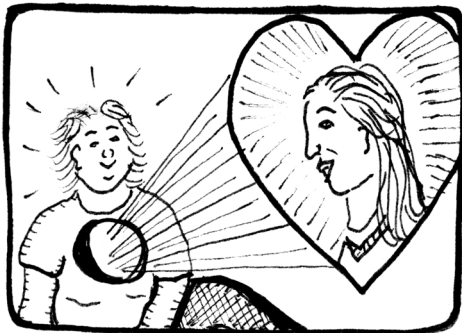
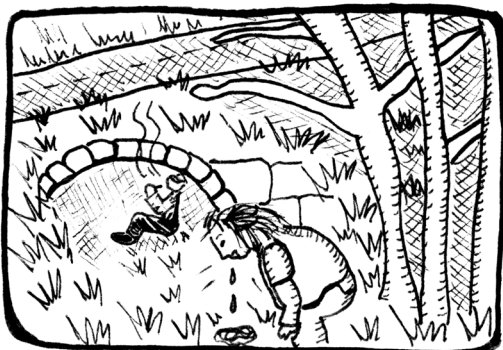
She bragged
about her boyfriend.

SHE WASN'T SHY

no.

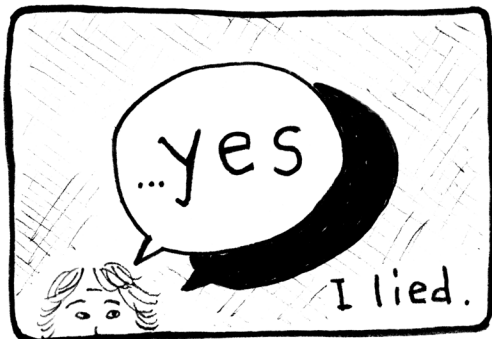


It didn't sound like the
"sex" I knew -
mostly blowjobs for icky
boys down by the crick,
the cost of a joint.

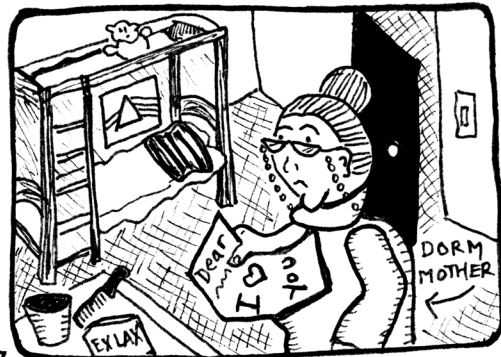


I wanted to be
like Punky. Even more,
I WANTED TO BE
LIKED BY HER.

When Punky
asked if I'd ever
DONE IT
with a girl...



There had been the girl
I'd fallen in love with at
boarding school. We hadn't
even kissed, but I had
confessed my **love** in a
letter, which was partly
how I ended up here on
this psych ward.



Later that night, Punky
put my lie to the test.



SO, SEX
WITH A
GIRL...

...WHAT'S
IT
LIKE?

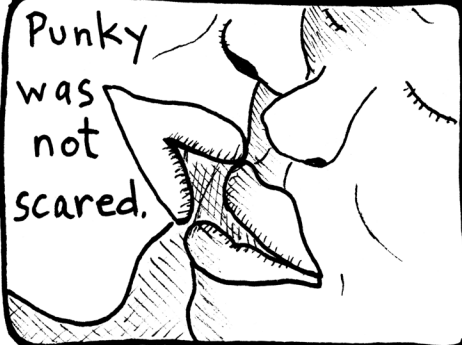


On her bed, nearest
the window, her words
pounded inside me, echoing
against the silence . . .
She moved toward me and
I recoiled, blurting out
the last thing on earth
I wanted to say...



I'M
SCARED

Punky
was
not
scared.



Challenged to prove
myself,

we
kissed...

and kissed...

...Until we heard the
distant knocking of
the night nurse doing
"lights out" rounds.
I quickly retreated
to my own bed.



My insides
churned
all
night



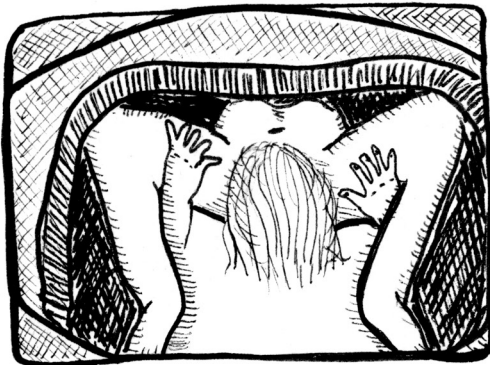
The next night
after lights out, Punky
came naked to my bed,
wordlessly crawling under
the covers, finding only
anticipation + desire.



Night
after
night
we found
each
other.



Until
they
found
us

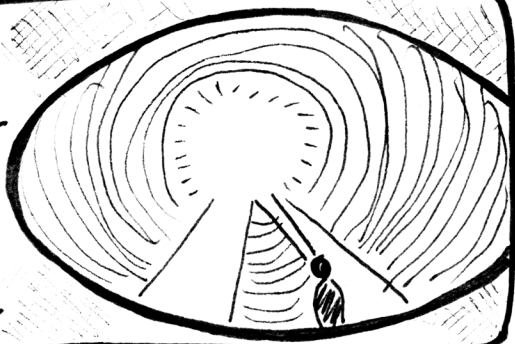


We'd been absorbed in
an illusion of privacy
under the blanket.

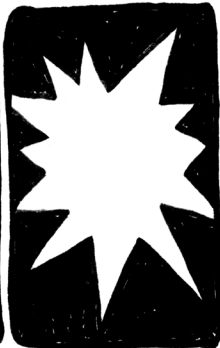
The night nurse tried
to piece together
what was happening

I could see the flashlight moving around the room... my empty bed... us under Punky's covers...

The eye came to life as the light reflected off the giant window.



Punky flew into a **RAGE**. Everything began to move very fast.



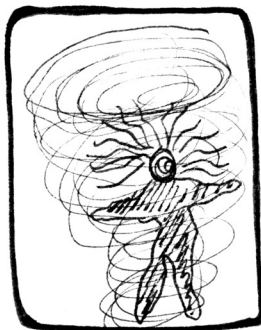
I ran to the bathroom.



Contraband dinner plates

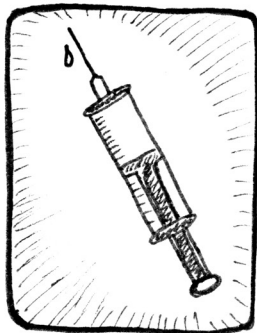


flew.



Punky was
a wild
**TORNADO
OF
FURY**

More staff
rushed in,
got her in
a "hold", and
hauled her
away, naked
+ screaming.



Alone in the room, I
emerged from hiding,
closed the door and
put on my pajamas.
I sat, numb for a
moment, before I
peeked outside.





I shut the door + got into bed. A dull numbness sunk in. I laid still and quiet, pretending to be asleep when the nurse came in to check on me.

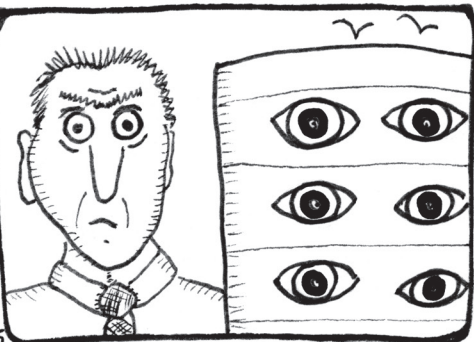
WAKE UP
YOUNG LADY!!
GET DRESSED
+ GO STRAIGHT
TO MY OFFICE!!

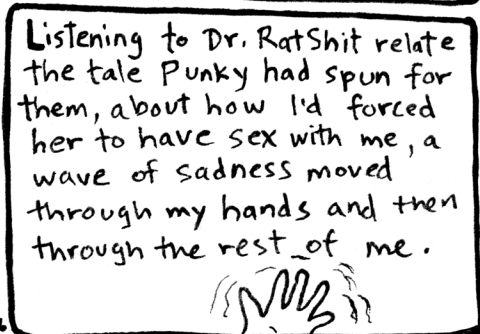
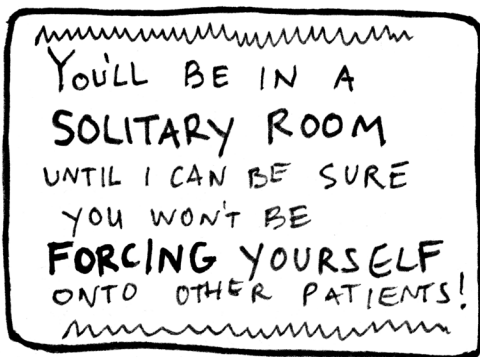


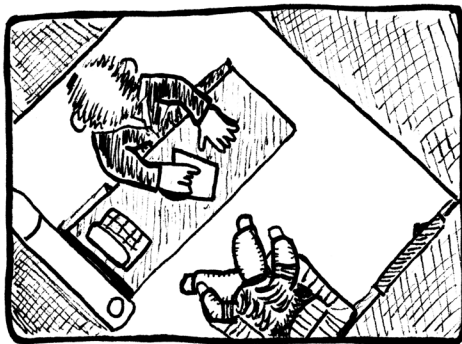
Dr. RatShit
was my first
human contact
the next morning.

I noticed that:

1. his eyes protruded
like the windows
2. Punky hadn't
returned.

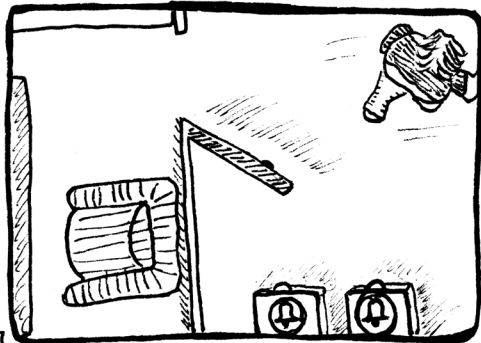




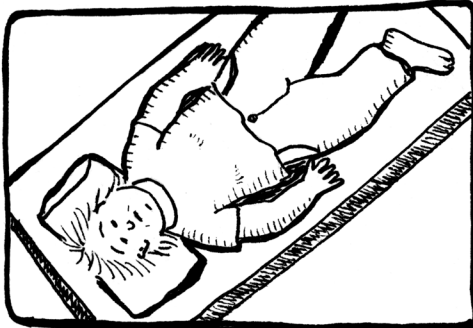


I floated up
and up
and gazed down at myself,
the doctor, the tiny
square room, so tiny...

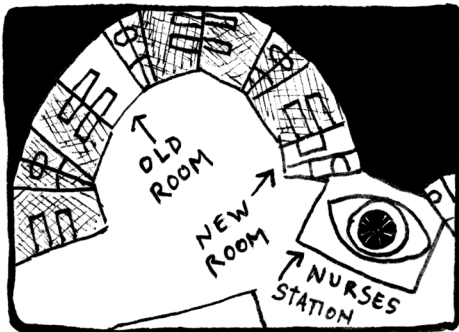
I followed myself
as I wandered back
toward my room
to gather my
things.



I watched myself notice
Punky in the common
space talking to some
girls, them laughing,
me looking away.



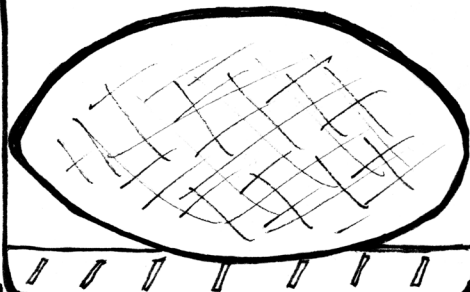
Inside the SINGLE
Room, I began to
regain contact with
myself, my body on
the bed, my head
on the pillow.



It was smaller than the double room. Everything else was the same:

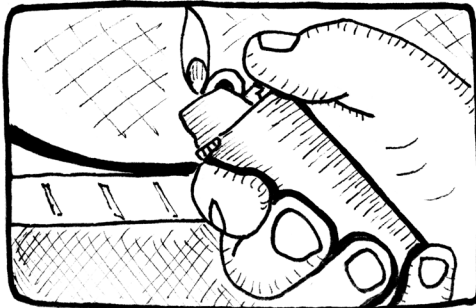
wide wooden door, with a smooth rectangular handle, tiny bathroom, and scarred, concave oval window opposite the door.

Even the view
was the same.



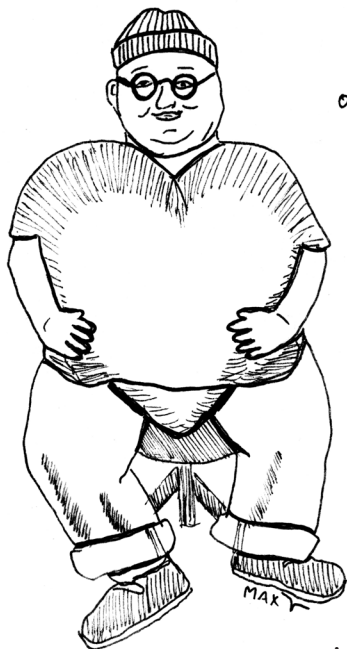
Leaning against the box
vent beneath the window,
I reached into my pocket.
I wrapped my fingers around
the smooth, familiar shape.

I pulled it out ...

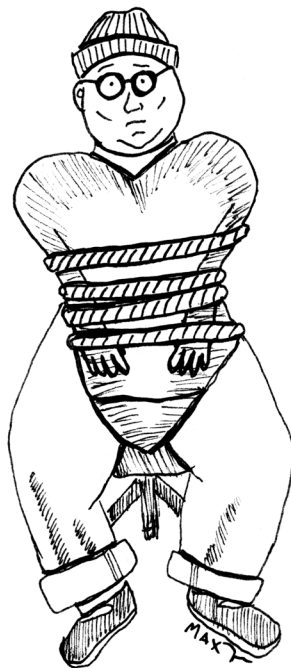


... and began
my
ESCAPE.

to be continued



OPEN / SHUT



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